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ABSTRACT

The challenge for a Web site designer is always to get the users to the correct information. According to experts in the field, site design should be aimed at simplicity above all else. This paper evaluates the Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education's Web site. The paper finds that the format is simple and excellent, easily accessible and navigable. It outlines the types of information that are available on the Web site and discusses the pros and cons of this information. The paper also lists seven recommendations for improving the Web site. Attached are several sample Web site pages. (NKA)

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Evaluation of Website:
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for

Indiana Clearinghouse for
Citizenship and Character Education

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Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

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1. Format

Websites are permanently under construction. The challenge for the designer is always to get the users to the correct information. Site design should be aimed at simplicity above all else according to experts in the field (Hurst &Neilson, 1999). We want to see clean information architecture. I believe that is shown in this website. The format for the Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education website is simple and excellent.

First, the graphics--although the initial screens do not contain many graphics or pictures, the logo is wonderful—so expressive of the message to be conveyed. It also has been translated beautifully onto the "small screen." Secondly, the format is visually pleasing—orderly, neat, easy to read, easy to access information. The home page has the requisite main features: a directory of the site's main content areas, a link to news and promotion or projects (although a short summary would be a good addition), and a simple search feature. The addition of a "feedback" link is excellent and tells the user that the designer and coordinator are interested in responding to the needs of the field. The name of the site and the logo are prominent and the page layout seems to work across most page sizes. The site name and logo are repeated on all interior pages. All the above assets spell "user-friendly." It would be good if the logo were clickable and linked to the home page, although there is a home page link on every page. Perhaps the lack of "clickability" is due to the fact that the home page for this site is actually the Indiana Department of Education home page rather than a direct home page for the Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education.

Usability studies show "that users complain bitterly when a site tries to use navigation interfaces that are drastically different from the ones they have come to expect from the majority of other sites" (Hurst &Neilson, 1999,p.189). The Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education site stays within the normal parameters and is easily accessible and navigable.

2. **Information.**

The "About" section, although it is repeated in another screen immediately following the first screen, is useful to the first-time user. It gives a concise summary of the genesis of the project and what the visitor can expect in subsequent exploration of the site. "Bureaucratic" sites often have ponderous mission statements, but this brief summary does not cross over into that territory. In general, users come to a site to accomplish something specific. My guess is that teachers and concerned citizens will come to this site to look for resources and projects—both are available with easy navigation around this site.

- **"About the Clearinghouse"**

This screen provides an excellent overview of the functions of the clearinghouse and resources available to teachers through this site. The inclusion of an e-mail address for an actual resource person is excellent.

- **"Good Citizenship Instruction"**

It is wise indeed to share this state mandate. In 1995, the Indiana General Assembly passed legislation requiring public schools to integrate citizenship education into the curriculum. In the past when such teaching has been challenged, the courts have held that schools may teach such values as support democracy, order, and safety in the classroom. Fortunately, today, in the current climate of school violence and general decline of public morality, the schools have no difficulty in making the case for values teaching. Still, is wise to include this foundation statement for all those interested in character education in this state.

- **"Coordinator's Responsibilities"**

I suppose this is useful for a specific audience and perhaps is a requirement of the grant, but it's not particularly useful to the general public.

- **"About Moral Education"**

I would like to see a source for this blurb on moral education. I would also like to see an expansion of this section. In addition to reading about support from the Indiana General Assembly, the consumer of this material who visits the site needs

to understand in some depth the crucial fact that moral education is at the very roots of democracy. In a government that is "for the people and by the people", the quality of character of the citizens who comprise that government must be ensured. Democracy is an idea supported by morality, namely the moral virtues good enable a society to promote the greatest good for the greatest number. Values such as work ethic, respect for the rights of individuals, and honesty are not just beliefs that, if held by students in classrooms, will promote better, safer schools; they are the very substance of government and of society in general. This country was founded on very specific moral values and public schooling included moral education as an integral part of the curriculum and the interactions among teachers and students.

External or internal links to specific parts of the "Declaration of Independence,". "The Constitution" and "Bill of Rights," Lincoln's speeches, etc would be interesting for the viewer and substantially reinforce the foundations of moral education. Perhaps on-line links to the materials in the Rotary "Freedom Shrine" documents could be added.

- **"About Citizenship Education"**

The material on this screen includes the statement, "In school, citizenship education is developed through classroom participation, elections, decision-making opportunities, social action to benefit the community....." I agree with that statement, but I would like the point to be made that a student can participate in all the various activities related to being a good citizen and still not develop as a moral person. Moral education and character education are inextricably linked and must be taught holistically. Group action and decision-making by the majority be may morally abhorrent. It is the moral or values education that ensures good decisions—the greatest good for the greatest number.

- **"Resources"**

This section on resources is the strongest and most useful link and rightfully so.

Service Learning. The table of contents provides an excellent overview of some very useful materials for those users who are interested in many available resources in service learning. Description and key elements, public law support, collaborative projects, articles and more. The "News and Special Events Calendar" is outstanding, containing great graphics, a comprehensive calendar of events and detailed descriptions of those events. The "Grants, etc" section is so

useful to schools who would like to jump in and find support for their projects. Awards listings rightfully recognize those who have made outstanding efforts in service learning. These listings encourage continued work in this area. The "Other State Programs" link provides a colorful update on programs around the state, many of which include great pictures of the various sites. The "Articles and Publications" link is still evolving. The inclusion of "the Christel House link is unusual. I'm not sure I see the relevance to service learning of a charity that supports orphaned children around the world. Perhaps the intent is to involve K-12 students in support of this charity. If so, there are 1000s of such charities to which this site could be linked. Requests for proposals for service learning grants are also handy and available at this service learning link.

National Council for the Social Studies Guidelines. The 20 principles and guidelines for the creation of meaningful governance systems within schools—guidelines that included students—are a good addition to the resource page and support the dissemination of character education and citizenship education around the state.

The Citizenship Resource Guide provided useful suggestions for teachers at all grade levels related to literature and lessons plans. Only a slight criticism--Why are the values not listed in alphabetical order? Are they thought by developers to be in order of importance perhaps?

Under "Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Community Members", Sharon Andrews' book for teachers is mentioned, but not her more recent book for parents (through the same publisher) *Teach your Children Values: 95 Things Parents Can Do* (1997). Thomas Lickona also has more recent books and considering adding Linda Ayres books also.

The heading "Citizens' Guide" is repeated with the subheading "Download the "Rooted in Character" graphic for your own publications. Great!

- **"Links to Other Sites"**

I'll be looking forward to the the development of this part of the site. It will be extremely valuable to users in the field.

Recommendations

1. Nothing has been done as of this writing to develop the eternal links to such sites as teacher.net, one of the most widely used Websites by teachers. Also, include links to sites that will support users' understanding of character education as a foundation

for a democratic society. If such groups as the Rotary—Freedom Shrine—have Websites, that would be a start. The consumer of this material who visits the site needs to understand in some depth the crucial fact that moral education is at the very roots of democracy and that moral education and citizenship education are connected but not interchangeable in practice. Links to home pages of character education centers, conferences, experts in the field, and publishers who focus on values-centered resource material would be a good addition.

2. There are a number of character education conferences around the country. Be sure in include and update those in the "News,etc." link.

3. The resources are coming along well, but there is a great more in the way of literature for children and young adults that could be included. In addition, there are a number of books for parents and teachers that could be included. Two resources that could be added are: Andrews, S. & Ali, C. (1997). *Teach your children values: 95 things parents can do* (ERIC/EDINFO Press, Bloomington, IN) and a 45 minute video and handbook for workshop for teachers and PTAs, Andrews, S. &Martin.D. (1999). *Teaching kids to care: Exploring values in the public school.* (ISBN 1-56676-702-4) The workshop handbook contains a number of references to additional teacher and parent resources and an extensive bibliography of childrens literature categorized by the major values in the books. Additional books by Thomas Lickona, Linda and Richard Ayres should be added.

4. Perhaps the wonderful logo could be a clickable link to the home page as so many logos are.

5. I like the "Feedback" feature. Perhaps some the feeback could be posted to show new users how others hav e been using/appreciating the site.

6. The "American Songs and Poems" link is a great idea, but some of the poetry is classic, but dull. It would be interesting to see this link develop perhaps more interactively and perhaps in connection with the feedback link, as place where teachers and other users could contribute original material or ideas for great material that is available and postable.

7. It would be great to see "chat room" or listserve type functions that allow kids and teachers to share on line the projects their schools and classrooms are involved in related to character education.

References

Hurst, M. & Nielsen, J. (1999). *Designing website usability.* Indianapolis: New Riders Press.

Indiana Department of Education

Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

Coordinator's Responsibilities

Rooted in Character

The clearinghouse coordinator is responsible for:

- maintaining the character education website, list serve, and hot links to other web sites;
- selecting and editing materials for the database;
- responding to requests for information;
- assisting networking efforts of partner and non-partner schools;
- providing assistance in planning and implementation of workshops and conferences; and
- coordinating the planning for the summative regional character education conference in year three of the grant.

Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

About the Clearinghouse

Rooted in Character

In 1999 the Indiana Department of Education, in partnership with three school corporations in Indiana, was awarded a three-year Partnership Grant for Character Education from the United States Department of Education. A part of the partnership grant calls for the creation of a statewide clearinghouse on citizenship and character education to serve both partner and non-partner schools, as well as other interested stakeholders. The clearinghouse website is maintained on the Indiana Department of Education web page.

The functions of the clearinghouse include:

- working with teachers and school systems in response to requests for information on and help in developing character education and citizenship programs to address individual needs;
- providing summary reviews of curriculum materials in line with state requirements and directives;
- developing a bibliography of books, articles, and relevant research on character education and citizenship;
- offering contact information about model programs and organizations involved with character education and citizenship;
- maintaining a calendar of events relating to character education and citizenship initiatives;
- conducting workshops, seminars, conferences and other outreach activities related to character education and citizenship;
- including sample lesson plans for K-12 curriculum from Indiana's Partners for Good Citizenship: Parents, Schools, and Communities, a resource guide created by classroom teachers and the Indiana Department of Education.

The website is administered by the Clearinghouse Coordinator in partnership with the Social Studies Consultant in the Indiana Department of Education.

Input from interested persons is encouraged. Comments can be directed to: eholt@doe.state.in.us

Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

Good Citizenship Instruction

Rooted in Character

(IC 20-10.1-4-4.5)

In 1995, the Indiana General Assembly passed legislation requiring public schools to integrate "good citizenship instruction" into the current curriculum. Good citizenship instruction is described as instruction that emphasizes the nature and importance of: (1) being honest and truthful; (2) respecting authority; (3) respecting the property of others; (4) always doing one's personal best; (5) not stealing; (6) possessing the skills necessary to live peaceably in society and not resorting to violence to settle disputes; (7) taking personal responsibility for obligations to family and community;(8) taking personal responsibility for earning a livelihood; (9) treating others the way one would want to be treated; (10) respecting the national flag, the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of the state of Indiana; (11) respecting one's parents and home; (12) respecting one's self; and (13) respecting the rights of others to have their own views and religious beliefs.

This mandate is similar to legislation passed previously in 1937 and 1975. It incorporates the ideas of earlier legislation and expresses the continuing concern of the Indiana General Assembly for the development of good citizens. It also serves as a reminder that citizenship education is one of the major responsibilities of the public schools, and it calls upon school personnel to renew their efforts to help students become good citizens.

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Indiana Department of Education

Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

About Moral Education

Moral education deals with the philosophical underpinnings of our individual motivations. Philosophers have long been concerned with the development of individual values and actions in the social community. Moral education is taught and practiced in the home and religious institutions, yet also carries over into the educational community which decides what is of value to the society and should be taught in the schools. Moral education focuses more on understandings and beliefs as a basis for understanding behaviors.

Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

About Citizenship Education

Rooted in Character

Citizenship education examines the conduct of the individual as part of a democratic society. External behaviors of "good citizenship" are identified through participation in the larger society with those behaviors contributing to the "common good". Citizenship education begins at an early age as we emphasize the rules of good social behavior as well as benefits to be gained from those actions. In school, citizenship education is developed through classroom participation, elections, decision-making opportunities, social action to benefit the community and similar opportunities for students to feel a part of the larger community and that their contributions are valued. Good citizenship opportunities in the school can translate into greater community involvement as an adult with greater voter turnout, service on juries, and involvement in community endeavors for improvement.

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IDEANET

home search feedback

Indiana Department of Education

Indiana Clearinghouse for Citizenship and Character Education

Resources

Rooted in Character

Service Learning Links

- IDOE Office of Professional Development's Service Learning Page

New Resources

- Martin Luther King, Jr., Commemorative Materials Available
- NCSS Guidelines and Principles for Student Government

Citizenship for the Curriculum

- Citizenship Resource Guide
  There are many ways to integrate the tenets of good citizenship into every academic area. Using this guide will help teachers encourage the principles upon which this great nation was founded.

Citizens Guide

- Literature for Elementary and Middle School Students
- Literature for High School Students
- Sample Programs and Resources for Citizenship Education
- Good Citizenship and Service Learning
- Organizations that Provides Citizenship and Character Education Material
- Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Community Members
- Resources for Music, Visual Arts, and Drama
- American Songs and Poems

Citizens Guide

- Download the "Rooted in Character" graphic for your own publications.
- The following file is in JPEG format, and is 44 KB in size. Click on this link, then go to the **File** menu, and select **Save as...** and pick a place on your computer to save the file. You can then import the graphic into most word processing or graphic manipulation programs.

Indiana Department of Education